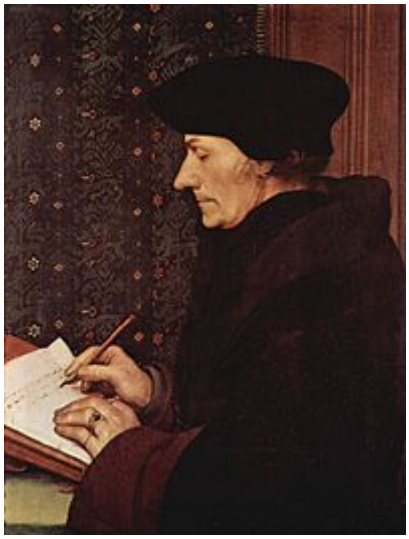
In Praise of Folly

In Praise of Folly, also translated as ***The Praise of Folly*** (Latin: *Stultitiae Laus* or *Moriae Encomium*; Greek title: Μωρίας ἐγκώμιον (*Morias egkomion*); Dutch title: *Lof der Zotheid*), is an essay written in Latin in 1509 by Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam and first printed in June 1511. Inspired by previous works of the Italian humanist Faustino Perisauli *De Triumpho Stultitiae*, it is a satirical attack on superstitions, other traditions of European society and on the Western Church.[1]



Erasmus in 1523, by Hans Holbein

Erasmus revised and extended his work, which was originally written in the space of a week while sojourning with Sir Thomas More at More's house in Bucklersbury in the City of London.[2] The title *Moriae Encomium* had a punning second meaning as *In Praise of More*. *In Praise of Folly* is considered one of the most notable works of the Renaissance and played an important role in the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation.[3]

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In Praise of Folly begins with a satirical learned encomium, in which Folly praises herself, in the manner of the Greek satirist Lucian, whose work Erasmus and Sir Thomas More had recently translated into Latin, a piece of virtuoso foolery; it then takes a darker tone in a series of orations, as Folly praises self-deception and madness and moves to a satirical examination of pious but superstitious abuses of Catholic doctrine and corrupt practices in parts of the Roman Catholic Church—to which Erasmus was ever faithful—and the folly of pedants. Erasmus had recently returned disappointed from Rome, where he had turned down offers of advancement in the curia, and Folly increasingly takes on Erasmus' own chastising voice. The essay ends with a straightforward statement of Christian ideal: "No Man is wise at all Times, or is without his blind Side."

Erasmus was a good friend of More, with whom he shared a taste for dry humor and other intellectual pursuits. The title "Morias Encomium" can also be read as meaning "In praise of More". The double or triple meanings go on throughout the text.

The essay is filled with classical allusions delivered in a style typical of the learned humanists of the Renaissance. Folly parades as a goddess, offspring of Plutus, the god of wealth and a nymph, Freshness. She was nursed by two other nymphs, Inebriation and Ignorance. Her faithful companions include Philautia (self-love), Kolakia (flattery), Lethe (forgetfulness), Misoponia (laziness), Hedone (pleasure), Anoia (dementia), Tryphe (wantonness), and two gods, Komos (intemperance) and Nigretos Hypnos (heavy sleep). Folly praises herself endlessly, arguing that life would be dull and distasteful without her. Of earthly existence, Folly

Hans Holbein's witty marginal drawing of Folly (1515), in the first edition, a copy owned by Erasmus himself (Kupferstichkabinett, Basel)

pompously states, "you'll find nothing frolic or fortunate that it owes not to me."

Reception

Moriae Encomium was hugely popular, to Erasmus' astonishment and sometimes his dismay. Even Erasmus' close friends had been initially skeptical and warned him of possible dangers to himself from thus attacking the established religion. Even Leo X and Cardinal Cisneros are said to have found it amusing.[4] Before Erasmus' death it had already passed into numerous editions and had been translated into Czech, French, and German. An English edition soon followed. It influenced the teaching of rhetoric during the later sixteenth century, and the art of adoxography or praise of worthless subjects became a popular exercise in Elizabethan grammar schools.[5] A copy of the Basel edition of 1515/16 was illustrated with pen and ink drawings by Hans Holbein the Younger.[6] These are the most famous illustrations of *In Praise of Folly*.

Its role in the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation[3] stem from the foundation of critique which the essay laid against the practices of the Church and its political allies.[7]

Notes

1. Zweig, Stefan (1934). *Erasmus And The Right To Heresy* (https://archive.org/details/ZweigStefanErasmusAndTheRightToHeresy/page/n59/mode/2up). pp. 51–52. Retrieved November 22, 2020.
2. Bucklersbury was "A short street leading from the junction of Cheapside and Poultry to Walbrook. It barely exists today." source with map (https://www.pepysdiary.com/encyclopedia/6375/).
3. Janin, Hunt (2008). *The University in Medieval Life, 1179–1499* (https://books.google.com/books?id=uhzV368KRDMC&q=In%20Praise%20of%20Folly%20Protestant%20Reformation&pg=PA160). McFarland. p. 160. ISBN 9780786452019. "Although Erasmus himself would have denied it vehemently, later reformers found that *In Praise of Folly* had helped prepare the way for the Protestant Reformation."
4. Collett, Stephen (1823). *Relics of literature*. Ludgate Hill, London: Thomas Boys.
5. McDonald, Charles O. (1966). *The Rhetoric of Tragedy: form in Stuart drama*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
6. Wolf, Norbert (2004). *Hans Holbein the Younger, 1497/98–1543: the German Raphael*. Cologne: Taschen. p. 11. ISBN 3822831670.
7. Von Dehsen, Christian D.; Scott L. Harris, eds. (1999). *Philosophers and Religious Leaders; Volume 2 of Lives and legacies* (https://books.google.com/books?id=25yC2ePhbXEC&q=In%20Praise%20of%20Folly%20Protestant%20Reformation&pg=PA62). Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 62. ISBN 9781573561525.

External links

- *The Praise of Folly* (https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/9371), translated by John Wilson in 1668, at Project Gutenberg

- *Praise of Folly* (https://archive.org/search.php?query=title%3Apraise%20folly%20AND%20creator%3Aerasmus%20AND%20mediatype%3Atexts) at Internet Archive (scanned books original editions)
- *In Praise of Folly* (https://archive.org/details/erasmusinpraiseo00erasiala), English translation published in 1922.
- Subhasis Chattopadhyay, Review of the Princeton Edition of *The Praise of Folly*, *Prabuddha Bharata*, 121 (4) (April 2016): 429–31 (http://philpapers.org/rec/CHAROT-18)
- *The Praise of Folly* (http://librivox.org/the-praise-of-folly-by-erasmus/), English audiobook recording at LibriVox
- *In Praise of Folly* (http://www.ccel.org/ccel/erasmus/folly.html) from Christian Classics Ethereal Library
- Desiderius Erasmus (1509). *Praise of Folly* (https://books.google.com/books?id=jVREZYIG8P0C). Published by Desiderius Erasmus. ISBN 9780140446081. – via Google Books

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